

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 OPR-02 AID-20 CIAE-00 COME-00

EB-11 FRB-02 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 TRSE-00 XMB-07

OPIC-12 SPC-03 CIEP-02 LAB-06 SIL-01 OMB-01 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 L-03 NSC-10 PA-03 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15

ACDA-19 IO-13 NIC-01 AGR-20 EUR-25 DRC-01 A-01 SY-10

/250 W

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R 191707Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0848

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 4557

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS

SUBJECT: STUDENTS AND BUTCHERS DEMONSTRATE

SUMMARY: DURING THE PAST FIVE DAYS POLICE RESORTED TO FORCEFUL MEASURES, INCLUDING TEAR GAS, TO BREAK UP THREE DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE DOWNTOWN CAPITAL AREA. ON SEPT. 14 UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ATTEMPTED TO HOLD PROHIBITED INDEPENDENCE DAY MARCH. ON SEPT. 17 AND 18 BUTCHERS AND BEEF DISTRIBUTORS DEMONSTRATED AGAINST HIGH COST AND ALLEGED POOR QUALITY OF BEEF. MOST BUTCHER SHOPS IN CAPITAL ON STRIKE SINCE SATURDAY, DEMANDING HALT TO BEEF EXPORTS. BUTCHERS STRIKE FOLLOWS SIMILAR ANTI-INFLATION PROTESTS BY BAKERS, COBBLERS AND OTHERS. DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE NOT THREATENED THE GOVERNMENT BUT GOG LEADERS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT INFLATION MAY BECOME THE PRINCIPAL ELECTION ISSUE. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING AN INDEPENDENCE DAY RALLY ON THE EVENING OF SEPT. 14, A GROUP OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ATTEMPTED
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TO MARCH THROUGH THE DOWNTOWN AREA TOWARD THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, IN DEFIANCE OF GOG REJECTION OF UNIVERSITY

STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION'S (AEU) REQUEST TO HOLD A "LIBERTY MARCH" TO EXPRESS IDEAS CONCERNING "THE INDEPENDENCE OF GUATEMALA". THE PRESS REPORTED THAT 100-200 YOUTHS TOOK PART IN THE DEMONSTRATION WHICH WAS BROKEN UP WITH TEAR GAS BUT NO SHOTS. ACCORDING TO ONE NEWSPAPER, SLOGANS CHANTED BY THE STUDENTS INCLUDED "CHILE YES; YANKES NO."

2. TEAR GAS WAFED THROUGH THE STREETS OF THE CAPITAL AGAIN ON THE MORNING OF SEPT. 16 WHEN THE POLICE BROKE UP A DEMONSTRATION IN FRONT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE PROTESTING THE HIGH COST AND ALLEGED POOR QUALITY OF BEEF. THE PRESS REPORTED THAT 500 BUTCHERS AND BEEF DISTRIBUTORS, ACCOMPANIED BY AEU LEADERS, SALLIED FORTH FROM AEU HEADQUARTERS SHOUTING "DOWN WITH (MINISTER OF ECONOMICS) MOLINA MENCOS" AND "THE PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY." REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BUTCHERS' UNION AND THE AEU WERE PERMITTED TO ENTER THE PALACE TO PRESENT A LETTER DEMANDING THAT MEAT EXPORTS BE PROHIBITED FOR THE REMAINDER OF 1973. THE DEMONSTRATORS CHARGED THAT THE NATION'S PRINCIPAL MEAT PACKERS AND WHOLESALERS, IN COLLUSION WITH THE CATTLE RAISERS, ARE EXPORTING HIGH QUALITY BEEF IN EXCESS OF THEIR CONTRACTS, RESULTING IN HIGH COST AND LOW QUALITY BEEF FOR GUATEMALAN CONSUMERS.

3. THE POLICE EMPLOYED TEAR GAS AGAIN SEPT. 17 TO DISPERSE A BUTCHERS' DEMONSTRATION IN FRONT OF CONGRESS. THE 200-MEMBER BEEF DISTRIBUTORS UNION AND THE BUTCHERS UNION, WHICH CLAIMS 4,000 MEMBERS, DECLARED THEY WOULD KEEP BEEF OFF THE MARKET AND KEEP THE BUTCHER SHOPS CLOSED UNTIL THE WHOLESALE PRICE OF BEEF, PRESENTLY AT ABOUT \$.47 PER LB., DROPS TO \$.35. NEARLY ALL MEAT STALLS IN THE CAPITAL MARKETS HAVE BEEN SHUT SINCE SATURDAY, BUT MOST SUPERMARKETS APPEAR TO BE UNAFFECTED BY THE ACTION. THE STRIKE SO FAR IS CONFINED PRIMARILY TO THE CAPITAL BUT THERE ARE REPORTS THAT SOME BUTCHERS HAVE CLOSED IN OTHER MAJOR TOWNS.

4. COMMENT: THE AEU'S "LIBERTY MARCH" AND THE STUDENTS' SUPPORT OF THE BUTCHERS' PROTEST ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE AEU'S HISTORY OF INVOLVEMENT IN ISSUES WHICH CAN BE
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EXPLOITED AT THE EXPENSE OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE BUTCHERS' ACTION IS THE MOST RECENT AND BEST ORGANIZED IN A SERIES OF ANTI-INFLATION PROTESTS BY BAKERS, COBBLERS, SUGAR PRODUCERS AND OTHERS. SOME WOMENS' ASSOCIATIONS EVEN HAVE THREATENED TO TAKE TO THE STREETS IN A "MARCH OF EMPTY POTS" MODELED ON THEIR CHILEAN SISTERS' DEMONSTRATIONS. THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMICS' CONSISTENT REPLY TO ALL THESE COMPLAINTS HAS BEEN THAT INFLATION IN GUATEMALA IS THE
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 SEP 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973GUATEM04557
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: RR
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: GUATEMALA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730923/aaaaaqin.tel
Line Count: 108
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags: ANOMALY
Review Date: 30 JAN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <30-Jan-2002 by martinml>; APPROVED <19 FEB 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STUDENTS AND BUTCHERS DEMONSTRATE
TAGS: PINS
To: SECSTATE WASHDC
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005